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## Howard County Times

### Two Howard County sites still being eyed for railroad container facility

*List of potential sites narrowed from 12 to four; Elkridge location troubles school board member*

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*Posted 3/30/11*

The likelihood that Howard County could become the new home of CSX Corp.'s railroad car transfer facility has grown, with the list of a dozen potential sites narrowed to four — including two in Howard.

The Howard sites under consideration are in Elkridge, north of Hanover Road between CSX's Camden Line and Race Road; and in Jessup, west of the Camden Line and north of Montevideo Road. The two other sites, also near the Camden Line, are in Anne Arundel County, south of Route 175 just across the Howard line, and in Prince George's County.

The container transfer facility is where large containers containing consumer goods are moved from trucks to trains for transport throughout the country.

The Elkridge site has been a cause of concern among county elected officials, school system leaders and community members because of its proximity to nearly 400 homes, a planned mixed-use development and a proposed elementary school.

"It just doesn't seem compatible to me," said state Sen. Edward Kasemeyer, who represents the

Elkridge area.

County Council member Courtney Watson, who also represents the Elkridge area, said she is concerned about the impact the facility could have on traffic and home values.

"We have to make sure that we're not unduly impacting people's homes," Watson said.

School system officials are worried about the site's proximity to a proposed elementary school at the corner of Coca-Cola and Park Circle drives. School board member Allen Dyer said the CSX facility would create "a perfect storm of where you shouldn't put a school.

"There would be tremendous traffic, all cargo, going up and down, going past the school twice a day," he said. "You have to transport the cargo on the road to the trains, then on the train again past the school."

Del. Guy Guzzone, who represents the Jessup area, said the Elkridge site is more problematic because it is in a mixed-use area. The Jessup site is in an industrial area.

"I haven't heard anything in terms of constituents on the Jessup site, but I think it's important to recognize that each of the sites has to go through the process," Guzzone said. "It's an intense operation, and I think its important that we look at it very carefully."

The four sites will go through a federal process, outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act, that involves assessing each site for environmental, economic, archeological and other issues, including the impact the sites would have on surrounding communities, Maryland Department of Transportation spokesman Jack Cahalan said. He expects the process take about a year.

The transportation department is working with CSX Corp., a rail-based transportation company, to move its container transfer facility out of the Port of Baltimore. The move is needed so trains can be stacked two containers high, a common standard in the freight shipping industry.

"The low clearance of the Howard Street Tunnel in Baltimore city does not provide freight railroads with the 'double stack' capability that is so critical to compete in today's business environment," Maryland Transportation Secretary Beverley K. Swaim-Staley said in a statement.

"By creating a new transfer facility at an appropriate industrial site south of Baltimore along the I-95 corridor, new doors of commerce will open for Maryland."

The project, estimated to cost \$150 million, will be funded through a combination of federal, state and CSX funds, Cahalan said.

Kasemeyer said he and other legislators are trying to figure out the state's financial commitment and put language in the budget to regulate it.

Earlier this month, the department and CSX officials met with Federal Railroad Administration officials to determine the criteria to be used in narrowing down the 12 originally proposed sites. They came up with five criteria, Cahalan said, including that the site had to be highway accessible, south of the Howard Street Tunnel, along CSX's Camden Line and on at least 70 acres of rectangular-shaped usable property.

Janet Siddiqui, chairwoman of the county Board of Education, said she wasn't surprised the two Howard sites, including the one near the proposed school, made the final list.

"The county's in such close proximity to the Baltimore port," she said.

The board learned that the Elkridge site was a possibility at a Feb. 24 board meeting.

Siddiqui said that the staff was receiving regular updates from the department, and that other locations for a new elementary school in Elkridge were being explored.

Three public workshops will be held in April to brief residents on the plans and get their feedback, including one in Howard County. The last public workshop with the transportation department will be held at Elkridge Landing Middle School on April 27, a day before the board will meet to discuss the building of the new elementary school.

"The timeline is difficult," Siddiqui said.

The department and CSX, meanwhile, are in the early stages of acquiring a site. Officials are still contacting some of the property owners.

"CSX and the state of Maryland are committed to the development of a world-class facility that is sensitive to both the surrounding communities and the environment," Louis Renjel, CSX's vice president for strategic infrastructure initiatives, said in a statement. "With the planned workshops, we are initiating a public dialogue that will assist us in identifying the best location to develop the facility."

Information on the potential sites and the evaluation process can be found on the **department of transportation's website**.

*Staff writer Sara Toth contributed to this report.*